

# **The Influence of NGO on Sino-Myanmar Relations and Its Countermeasures under the Transformation of Political Democratization in Myanmar**

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**Abstract:** One of the effects of Myanmar's political democratization is the sudden emergence of NGOs. Taking advantage of Myanmar's political transformation, Western NGOs have been able to enter Myanmar on a large scale, and local NGOs in Myanmar have also developed rapidly. In addition to carrying out traditional public welfare undertakings, Western NGOs and local NGOs in Myanmar have gradually deepened their involvement and interference in Myanmar's domestic and foreign affairs, focusing on the friendly and stable Sino-Myanmar relations. On the basis of material and intellectual support from western countries, under the inducement of western NGO values diplomacy, and under the catalysis of domestic nationalism, the influence of local NGOs in Myanmar is increasing, which poses a real threat to Sino-Myanmar relations and China's interests in Myanmar. In this regard, China can adopt value equivalence diplomacy, cultivate local international NGOs, support domestic NGOs to go abroad, and strengthen the research and contact with domestic NGOs in Myanmar, so as to ease and optimize the Sino-Myanmar relations under the double attack of western NGOs and local NGOs in Myanmar.

**Keywords:** Myanmar; Political Transition; NGO; Sino-Myanmar Relations

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Myanmar's political democratization transformation (hereinafter referred to as political transformation), which began in 2011, has triggered many effects, including the sudden emergence of NGOs (non-

governmental organizations) in Myanmar. Surprisingly, NGOs in Myanmar have openly questioned and challenged the traditional Sino-Myanmar relations. Sino-Myanmar relations, which have always been known as "pauk-phaw friendship", have encountered interference and impact, and Sino-Myanmar relations have been cast a shadow. Therefore, we must carefully examine the NGO as a special actor. NGOs in Myanmar, the new paradise of NGOs, have been booming and have attracted the world's attention Since 2008. There are three reasons for this: First, the cyclone Nargis, which shocked the world and caused great property and personnel losses in Myanmar in 2008, enabled various Western NGOs to enter Myanmar in batches; second, the political transformation of Myanmar since 2011 has spawned a number of local NGOs, which have taken advantage of the opportunity to grow; Third, in 2014, the Parliament of the Union of Myanmar passed the new Law on the Registration of Associations, and its loose access standards further accelerated the development of NGOs (Li & Li, 2019). One obvious consequence is that since around 2010, Myanmar, which lacks a sense of existence, has frequently generated topics in the international community, one of which is that its increasingly active domestic NGOs have attracted international attention; the other is that Myanmar's domestic NGOs have begun to take China as the target of criticism, and Sino-Myanmar relations have encountered new difficulties and challenges. The influence of NGOs on Sino-Myanmar relations is mainly reflected in the famous Myitsone Hydropower Station incident and the political rumors and manipulation against China after the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021. The symbolic significance of the two in the influence of NGOs on Sino-Myanmar relations is a problem area worth exploring. This paper will take the Myitsone Hydropower Station incident and the military coup in Myanmar in 2021 as the incision to dissect the constraints and influence of Western NGOs and local NGOs in Myanmar on Sino-Myanmar relations, and explore how China treats others in their own way, that is, to hedge and offset the negative impact of NGOs in Myanmar on Sino-Myanmar relations through NGOs.

## 2. WESTERN NGO IN MYANMAR

In international relations, western NGOs have a dual nature, both committed to public welfare and environmental protection, and keen to promote values. As early as 2005, British scholar D. Lewis pointed out: "NGOs have become a very indefinite form of organization. Sometimes it presents a dual character, alternating between public and private,

professional and amateur, market and non-market, radicalism and pluralism, modernity and tradition, and perhaps finally between good and evil (Lewis, 2005). "It is worth noting that Western NGOs are not as neutral and far away from politics as they claim. Like interest groups, NGOs will also intervene in politics and try to influence relevant government policies in the name of public welfare ". Western NGOs in Myanmar clearly reflect the above characteristics. In addition to the traditional public welfare undertakings, Western NGOs in Myanmar pay more attention to the promotion of Western values, as well as the shaping and transformation of Myanmar's domestic values, which inevitably poses a realistic impact and threat to Sino-Myanmar relations (Qin, 2012).

## 2.1 History and Development of Western NGOs in Myanmar

Since 1988, when the Myanmar military government tried to open the tightly closed door, a small number of Western NGOs began to operate in Myanmar, but because of the military government's consistent vigilance and strict control of NGOs, the development of Western NGOs in Myanmar is slow with little influence.

After Myanmar's political transition in 2011, elected President Thein Sein publicly declared that "during the democratic transition, the government should strengthen cooperation with civil society organizations", the situation has changed significantly: In 2012, for example, there were 270 Western NGOs registered in Myanmar. In fact, there are about 1000 Western NGOs operating in Myanmar. After Myanmar's political transformation in 2011, the performance of Western NGOs in Myanmar has changed dramatically: in the 1990s and around 2000, Western NGOs successfully advocated their governments to impose economic sanctions on Myanmar's military government based on Myanmar's human rights situation, and with Myanmar's political transformation, the above-mentioned Western NGOs began to change their activities. Work increasingly with local NGOs in Myanmar on a range of issues.

Table 1(a): Activities of Western NGOs in Myanmar

<b>Name</b>	<b>Location of Headquarters</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Areas of Activity</b>
National Endowment for Democracy	America	Congress of the United States	Democracy, human rights
American International Republican Institute	America	Congress of the United States	Democracy, human rights
Human Rights Watch	America	Folk	Human rights

Table 1(b): Activities of Western NGOs in Myanmar

<b>Name</b>	<b>Location of Headquarters</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Areas of Activity</b>
International Rivers Network	America	Folk	Environmental protection
Oxfam	The UK	Folk	Health, education, social development
Amnesty International	The UK	Folk	Human rights, rule of law
Japan Platform	Japan	Folk	Humanitarian assistance
Nippon Foundation	Japan	Folk	Public health, foreign aid
Mekong Watch	Japan	Folk	Social development
			Environmental protection

"After Myanmar's new government opened its door, a large number of Western non-governmental organizations began to regard it as a paradise". From Yangon to Mandalay, from the lowlands of southern Myanmar to the highlands of northern Myanmar, Western NGOs are everywhere, and their activities cover a wide range of environmental protection, human rights, education, women and children, medical care and other fields, as well as providing financial and intellectual support to the Myanmar public and social organizations with political democratization aspirations." After the political transformation of Myanmar, the development of western NGOs mainly focuses on three aspects: First, the shift from public welfare activities to the provision of financial and intellectual support for Myanmar's political transformation go hand in hand. The second is to strengthen cooperation with Myanmar's domestic political parties and increase assistance to Myanmar's political parties. The third is that some western environmental protection organizations actively participate in Myanmar's domestic "anti-dam movement" (Kong & Lei, 2014). Generally speaking, the number and scale of Western NGOs in Myanmar as well as the field and form of their activities, are significantly different from those before the political transformation of Myanmar; Western NGOs have penetrated more deeply into all aspects of Myanmar society, and their involvement in Myanmar's politics and diplomacy has become more obvious.

## 2.2 Influence of Western NGOs in Myanmar on China-Myanmar Relations: Adding Fuel to the Fire

In international relations, the United States is the only superpower, and in the field of NGO, it is also a superpower. Data show that there are more than 2 million NGOs in the United States, with a total funding of more

than \$500 billion and about 9 million full-time and part-time staff. According to incomplete statistics, American NGOs with international influence mainly include the National Endowment for Democracy, the International Republican Institute, the International Democratic Institute, the Center for International Private Enterprise, the Center for International Labor Solidarity, and Freedom House. It is not difficult to see that most of these powerful and well-known American NGOs have obvious values. In fact, in the international political arena, especially in the field of human rights and democratic politics, some American NGOs are not only advocates and promoters of American ideology and values, but also pawns and pioneers of American government diplomacy (He, 2006). "Taking the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) of the United States, which was the first to carry out activities in Myanmar, as an example, its purpose is to promote Western values with the help of NGOs, to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries relying on pro-American forces, to forcibly implant American democracy, and to ensure the strategic interests of the United States in the world". Among the non-governmental organizations opposed to China's energy investment projects in Myanmar, the Danrui Natural Gas Movement (also known as Shwe Gas Movement) and the Kachin Development Network Group are directly sponsored by the National Foundation for Democracy. "According to diplomatic cables from the U.S. Embassy in Myanmar, in 2010, the United States funded two local NGOs in Myanmar to participate in the opposition to the construction of the Myitsone Dam." (Zhang & Liu, 2014).

In addition, Japanese NGOs such as "Mekong Watch" and "Salween Watch" jointly intervened in the Myitsone Hydropower Station incident, creating anti-China public opinion under the banner of "anti-dam movement", which eventually prompted the Myanmar government to decide to shelve the construction of Myitsone Hydropower Station (Bao & Huang, 2016). In recent years, the U.S. government has taken Myanmar as the core of its *return to the Asia-Pacific strategy*, which shows that it attaches great importance and concern to Myanmar's geopolitical value. Western NGOs, led by the United States, also regard Myanmar as a "paradise". Under such an international background, Western NGOs, in conjunction with Myanmar's "Great Myanmar Nationalism" forces, have constantly slandered China in Myanmar's ethnic local armed forces and other aspects, while cultivating a number of local democratic fighters in Myanmar. It has supported various think tanks such as the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and Policy Studies (The Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar) and the Myanmar Institute of Political Studies (Taguang Institute of Political

Studies). The formation of public opinion distribution centers, the dissemination of comments and articles stigmatizing and demonizing the Chinese government have greatly influenced and influenced Myanmar society's perception of China. Taking the military coup in Myanmar, which shocked the international community in February 2021, as an example, after the military coup was launched because of its own interests and status being threatened, a series of strange remarks against China spread like wildfire, such as Beijing's covert support for the military coup in Myanmar, China's delivery of weapons to the military in Myanmar, and China's support for the military coup. As a result, public opinion in Myanmar has targeted the Chinese government one after another (Jimura & Wise, 2020).

One of the typical examples is that on February 5, 2021, a few days after the Myanmar military launched a coup, under the premeditated instigation of Western NGOs. Workers at the Yangtse copper mine, one of China's largest projects in Myanmar, went on strike to protest China's so-called support for the military coup in Myanmar. The fierce fermentation of political rumors in Myanmar and the promotion of the black hand behind it eventually led to the collective beating, smashing, looting and burning of Chinese-funded enterprises in Myanmar on March 14 of the same year. Some of these Western NGOs are "eye-catching". The Myanmar Human Rights Network (BHRN), a non-governmental organization registered in the United Kingdom, directly incited attacks on Chinese enterprises, and its founder even publicly declared that if a Myanmar civilian is killed, a Chinese factory will be reduced to ashes."

### 3. LOCAL NGOS IN MYANMAR

#### 3.1 Current Situation and Trend of Local NGOs in Myanmar

After Myanmar's political transformation in 2011, the space for political activities has become more relaxed, especially in urban areas, where additional resources and stakeholders have helped various NGOs to form and flourish. Civil society organizations have become more active and involved in local, national and international affairs and even the internal affairs of the Myanmar government. Increasing independent media and investigative reporting, protests, and increased civic awareness have increased the transparency of Myanmar society and increased the awareness and participation of Myanmar citizens in politics. As a result, NGOs have achieved unprecedented development and growth, focusing on environmental protection, human rights, democracy, diplomacy and other issues from traditional public welfare projects.

According to the official website of Myanmar Information Management Unit, according to different information sources and statistical calibers, there are about 270 local NGOs in Myanmar. Some bold statistics even speculate that there are more than 10000 local NGOs in Myanmar. According to incomplete statistics, At present, there are local NGOs with relatively strong influence and activity ability in Myanmar, such as Irrawaddy Magazine, Democratic Voice of Myanmar, Myanmar Political Prisoners Assistance Association, Myanmar Strategic and Policy Research Institute, Justice for Myanmar, Myanmar Peace Foundation, Myanmar River Network, Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association, Kachin Development Network Organization, Salween Watch, Than Shwe Natural Gas Movement, etc. Among them, the Than Shwe Natural Gas Movement (SGM) clearly declares that its purpose is to oppose the Than Shwe Natural Gas Project and the China-Myanmar Oil Pipeline, and to promote human rights and environmental justice.

Table 2: Overview of local NGO activities in Myanmar

Name	Location of Headquarters	Background	Areas of Activity
The Irrawaddy Journal	Thailand	Burmese journalist in exile	Democracy, human rights
Voice of Democracy in Myanmar	Burma	Folk	Democracy, human rights
Burma Political Prisoners Assistance Association	Thailand/ Myanmar	Folk	Human rights
Myanmar Institute of Strategic and Policy Studies	Burma	Folk	Democracy
the Metta Development Foundation	Burma	Folk	Social development
The Nyein Foundation	Burma	Folk	Human rights
Myanmar River Network	Thailand	Folk	Human rights, democracy
Biodiversity and Conservation Society	Burma	Folk	Environmental protection
Kachin Development Network	Burma	Folk	Environmental protection
Salwyn Watch	Thailand	Local governments in northern Myanmar	Social development
The Shwe Gas Movement	Unknown	Folk	Environmental protection

For a long time, the low governance capacity of the central government and the backwardness of the social security system in Myanmar have been widely criticized. In addition, after the political transformation, the relative decline of the authority of the central government and the increasingly limited functions of the state have provided new space for the development of local non-governmental organizations (Sun, 2018). "On the other hand, because the government is financially weak and needs to invest a lot of resources to deal with civilian armed-forces, the Myanmar government is also pleased to see local NGOs exercise some government functions instead of themselves, so the control of local NGOs tends to be loose or even indulgent."

At the present stage, local NGOs in Myanmar can be described as a mixture of good and bad. There are not only organizations loyal to public welfare and devoted to helping the vulnerable groups in society, but also radical environmentalists, intellectuals who prefer political issues and are fond of "discussing democracy", as well as a few ultra-nationalist organizations that "oppose everything from China". Take the Irrawaddy magazine, which has great influence in Myanmar and abroad, as an example. The magazine exemplifies the distinct idea of anti-junta and anti-China. Throughout the website of Irrawaddy magazine, a considerable part of the content includes comments, cartoons and so on, which usually criticize and ridicule the junta and China.

### 3.2 The influence of local NGOs in Myanmar on Sino-Myanmar relations

After the political transformation, with the relaxation of social control, non-governmental organizations, religion, politics and other social forces have emerged in Myanmar, extremist speech has been widely disseminated, and extreme religious nationalism, extreme resource nationalism and Greater Myanmar nationalism have emerged, which has intensified religious and ethnic contradictions in Myanmar.

The strong nationalist sentiment of the Burmese people is also reflected in the treatment of Chinese investment. Some NGOs incited and organized people to oppose the Myitsone Hydropower Station Project invested by China and the Letpadaung Copper Mine Project jointly invested by China and Myanmar in the name of "resource plunderers". Local NGOs in Myanmar, represented by "Myanmar Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association", "Myanmar River Network" and "Kachin Development Network Organization", launched a siege on the Myitsone hydropower project led by China under the banner of "anti-dam movement". The huge pressure of public opinion forced the central government of Myanmar to



decide to shelve the Myitsone project, and there is no sign of restarting it until today. It can be said that the Myitsone project has actually failed.

In the political rumors and manipulations against China after the military coup in Myanmar in 2021, local NGOs in Myanmar are also active, among which "Myanmar Strategic and Policy Research Institute" and "Justice for Myanmar" are more representative. According to the official website of the former, many international foundations such as the National Foundation for Democracy of the United States are donors to the Institute. Most of the China-related articles published on the official website of the non-governmental organization are biased towards the West, and generally tend to question and oppose the Chinese government.

The latter spared no effort to discredit China during the political turmoil in Myanmar, and relied on the extremely anti-China "Radio Free Asia" to publish and disseminate its so-called investigation report. The group has issued a report claiming that the Burmese people believe that China acquiesced in the coup launched by the Burmese military and provide ammunition and capital for the army to launch a coup.

#### 4. CHINA'S NGOS IN MYANMAR

##### 4.1 Current Situation and Development of Chinese NGOs in Myanmar

In China, NGOs are generally called "social organizations", which can be divided into three types: "social organizations", "foundations" and "private non-enterprise units". According to the Statistical Bulletin on the Development of Civil Affairs in 2021 issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China in December 2021, by the end of 2021, there were 902,000 social organizations in China. Taking the United States as a reference, it has about 2 million NGOs with a population of more than 300 million. In terms of quantity alone, the number of NGOs in China does not match China's status as a world power. When it comes to Chinese NGOs going out and their international influence, there is a bigger gap between Chinese NGOs and Western NGOs at this stage. Taking 2014 as an example, there are 529 international and foreign-related social organizations in China, accounting for only 0.09% of the total number of 606,000 social organizations in 2014.

It is slightly surprising that up to now, there is no real international NGO in China, that is, an international NGO initiated in China and headquartered in China. Taking the year of 2014 as an example, according to the statistics of the annual briefing of the non-profit sector in the United States, there are 7001 international NGOs in the United States. According

to the business statistics of the British Overseas Development NGO Network (BOND), there were more than 400 international NGOs in the UK in 2014; according to the statistics of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, as of October 2014, there were 328 international NGOs in Japan. "There are not many non-governmental organizations in China that go abroad, even fewer that can exert influence in international affairs, and even fewer that can represent China in the international arena and safeguard its national interests and image."(Chen & Liu, 2016)."

Taking Myanmar as an example, at least before 2013, there were few signs of activities of Chinese NGOs in Myanmar, and the presence and popularity of NGOs from China in Myanmar society were very low. The research of some scholars and the reports of media reporters also confirmed the reality of Chinese NGOs in Myanmar at that time: "Very few Chinese NGOs have been working in Myanmar for a long time, which is inconsistent with the fact that China is a neighbor of Myanmar and the largest source of investment (Li & Li, 2019)"; "Ordinary people and elites in Myanmar seldom feel the existence of Chinese NGOs, and the influence of Chinese NGOs is even less."

Until July 2015, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (now the China Rural Development Foundation) became the first Chinese NGO registered in Myanmar. In addition, the Women's and Children's Development Center of Ruili City, Yunnan Province, China has also set up an office in Muse, Myanmar, and jointly carried out project assistance activities with the Women's Association of Muse District. In addition to the above two NGOs, the main Chinese NGOs currently active in Myanmar are the China Overseas Exchange Association, the Chinese People's Association for Friendship and Exchange with Foreign Countries, the China Peace and Development Foundation, and the China Association for the Promotion of International Exchange of Non-governmental Organizations. GEI (Global Environmental Institute), Beijing, and Yunnan Non-governmental Foundation for International Friendship and Exchange (Zhang & Zhang, 2017).

As the first Chinese NGO registered in Myanmar, the China Rural Development Foundation has launched seven projects in three categories, namely, quality education, zero hunger and clean water, in Myanmar, focusing on the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, such as poverty eradication, zero hunger, quality education, clean water and decent work. GEI (Global Environmental Institute) is a local NGO in China, which was registered in Beijing in 2004. GEI is committed to promoting international cooperation on issues such as environment and

energy, especially South-South cooperation. It is one of the first Chinese NGOs to successfully implement projects overseas. In November 2014, GEI and the Ministry of Resources and Environmental Protection of Myanmar started cooperation on the China-Myanmar Timber Trade Governance Project, which is also the first cooperation project between Chinese NGOs with unofficial backgrounds and foreign governments.

Table 3: Overview of Chinese NGO Activities in Myanmar (incomplete statistics)

Name	Place of Registration	Background	Areas of Activity
China Rural Development Foundation	Beijing, China	Official	Poverty alleviation projects and micro-credit
China Peace and Development Foundation	Beijing, China	Official	Health care, education, vocational training
China Overseas Exchange Association	Beijing, China	Official	Chinese education and cultural exchange
Chinese People's Association for Friendship and Exchange with Foreign Countries	Beijing, China	Official	Humanitarian assistance
International Exchange of Chinese Non-governmental Organizations Promotion Association	Beijing, China	Official	People's diplomacy
Global Environment Institute	Beijing, China	Unofficial	Environmental protection
Non-governmental international friendly exchanges in Yunnan Province Foundation	Kunming, China	Unofficial	Health care
Ruili Women and Children Development Center	Ruili, China	Unofficial	Health care, women and children

It can be seen that the vast majority of Chinese NGOs that have carried out field projects overseas are "Chinese" organizations, focusing on emergency humanitarian assistance, education, medical treatment, exchanges and seminars. Among them, the China Overseas Exchange Association mainly carries out Chinese education and cultural exchange activities in Myanmar; the China Peace and Development Foundation and the Yunnan Non-governmental International Friendship Exchange

Foundation focus on the international rehabilitation public welfare activities "Brightness Action" in Myanmar; the China Friendship Association prefers humanitarian assistance to Myanmar; The China NGO International Exchange Promotion Association focuses on the people-to-people diplomacy between China and Myanmar, such as the China-Southeast Asia People-to-people Dialogue, China-Myanmar People-to-people Exchange Roundtable and other people-to-people diplomacy activities; the Global Environment Institute is committed to cooperating with Myanmar government agencies and NGOs to carry out environmental policy training and exchanges.

#### 4.2 How to make good use of NGOs in international relations

" (In international relations), NGOs have done a lot for the U.S. government to achieve political goals and safeguard the national interests of the United States. While they regulate 'the world', they have spared the U.S. government the blame of interfering in the internal affairs of other countries." (Qin, 2012). NGO is an important part of the country's soft power and an important manifestation of the country's comprehensive national strength. With the increasing of China's comprehensive national strength and the rising of its international status, the internationalization of China's NGO is worth considering. "The international activities of NGOs can provide a potentially significant venue for China's values and national interests." (Gu, 2003). "Therefore," the Chinese government can use the unique communication mode and influence of NGOs to hedge and eliminate the pressure of public opinion, disseminate China's diplomatic and development concepts to the world, and form an international public opinion environment (Chen & Liu, 2016) conducive to the implementation of China's "The Belt and Road Initiative" strategy ". At the same time, the Chinese government should vigorously support the development of local NGOs with international tendencies, promote the construction of international networks of local NGOs, and try to incorporate NGOs into the national foreign aid system, pay attention to the stable response to Western and target NGOs in foreign relations, so as to reduce interference and obstacles to the development of state-to-state relations.

"Non-governmental organizations have the natural advantage of participating in public diplomacy.". They have no official background and can dispel each other's doubts about China. We should recognize the energy of non-governmental organizations, encourage the development and growth of non-governmental organizations, and make good use of this energy to carry out public diplomacy activities (Han, 2015). For example,

after the suspension of the Myitsone Hydropower Station in 2011, the Beijing-based Global Environment Institute (GEI) led a conference on China's overseas investment and environmental and social management in Myanmar and Beijing, inviting stakeholders of the Myitsone Project to discuss and cooperate with China Electric Power Investment Corporation (CETIC) to immigrate to the Myitsone Hydropower Station. In-depth understanding of local villagers' views on Myitsone Hydropower Station and the impact of the suspension of the hydropower station. Although the actual effect of similar public diplomacy led by NGOs remains to be observed, it is an effective way to dispel the doubts of the people of the target country and fully observe the public opinion of the target country.

## 5. CHINA'S COUNTERMEASURES

### 5.1 Face up to and study the great influence of Western values on diplomacy

Li Jianhua believes that Value-Oriented Diplomacy generally refers to the diplomatic style formed by a government in its foreign policy and foreign exchanges based on its mainstream value demands. In China, value-oriented diplomacy is usually used to refer to the diplomatic approach of Western countries based on traditional values and principles such as human rights, democracy and freedom (Li & Zhang, 2009). It is universally recognized that Western countries have two powerful weapons in international relations, one is value diplomacy, the other is NGO. Among them, NGO acts as an effective carrier of the values diplomacy of the western countries led by the United States, and the two complement each other and make use of each other. It must be admitted that in the struggle of international public opinion, China is actually at a disadvantage because of the strong economic and cultural influence of the western countries. This can be seen from The Civil Disobedience Movement against the military coup in Myanmar in 2021.

Value-oriented diplomacy has a particularly strong impact on young people, intellectuals and the urban middle class in Myanmar. For instance, The Civil Disobedience Movement in Myanmar is almost the same to civil political movements in Western countries. For example, on Twitter, which is widely used by Burmese people, "civil disobedience" became the most popular hashtag after the military coup in Myanmar, followed by "justice in Myanmar". It can be seen that after the military coup in Myanmar, Western countries have gained the popularity of Western values in

Myanmar, while China has gained groundless suspicion and malicious attacks. The values carefully packaged by Western countries have captured many intellectuals and ordinary people in developing countries through NGOs.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Germany pursued a foreign policy of values, India declared a foreign policy based on the concept of freedom and democracy, and Japan advocated an arc of freedom and prosperity, all of which seem to reveal that an era of values diplomacy dominated by Western countries has quietly arrived (Li & Zhang, 2009). "Western values diplomacy has become popular, testing and impacting China's diplomacy and eroding China's diplomatic resources and influence.". Due to the "value-oriented" characteristics of Western-dominated international politics, the realistic path of China's diplomatic value neutrality has been questioned and challenged (Li & Zhang, 2009). Taking the United States, the leader of western values diplomacy, as an example, exporting and disseminating values is an important goal and distinct feature of American diplomacy, as well as the purpose and mission of many American NGOs, and "values" has become an indispensable soft power of the United States. In recent years, the western countries led by the United States have continuously exerted diplomatic pressure on China's values, which has plunged China's diplomacy into a morally "unjust" and passive situation (Tian, 2012).

As early as 2006, Japanese Prime Minister Abe proposed to carry out values diplomacy, and Myanmar became the focus of his practice of values diplomacy. For Myanmar, Japan takes the political transformation of Myanmar that began in 2010 as an opportunity to deepen bilateral relations, while strengthening its values diplomacy with Myanmar, trying to infiltrate Western universal values into Southeast Asia and create an arc of freedom and prosperity with common values with Japan (Bi & Tian, 2016 ). From the above, we can see that both the United States, the core of the Western values community, and Japan, the Asian pioneer of Western values, regard Myanmar as a key country to export and practice their values, and try to eliminate China's influence on Myanmar, resist Chinese investment and hinder the smooth development of Sino-Myanmar relations through values diplomacy. Western countries, represented by the United States, Britain and Japan, mainly rely on their own NGOs to disseminate and infiltrate values in Myanmar, thus shaping pro-Western forces and groups. From this point of view, Western countries have indeed made "achievements" that can not be ignored.

## 5.2 In-depth study of the success of Western NGOs in Myanmar and other neighboring countries of China and their impact on Sino-Myanmar relations

Why Do Western NGOs affix much value to Myanmar? Why is Myanmar called the "paradise" of NGOs? What kind of political and social environment has fostered the "fertile soil" for NGOs to be active? What does this mean for China? There is a view that it stems from the following reasons: First, the spirit of missionaries. To be fair, (some) Europeans have a sense of mission and compassion for the developing world. In dealing with foreign cultures, they have a strong tolerance and can accept and actively integrate into the local culture. The second is the mature concept of civil society and the ability to operate. For democratic politics, civil society, social movements and other topics, Western countries have a set of mature concepts and perfect practical programs, which can directly and effectively guide the development and improvement of NGOs in Myanmar. These meet the needs of the development of party politics and associations after Myanmar's political transformation. Third, a sound support system. In terms of NGO operation and development, western countries have more mature routines, which are closely related to the development of mature civil society in developed countries. It promotes non-governmental diplomacy through public welfare and influences the impression of the people of the target country on their own country. Fourth, the "revolving door" of occupation is smooth. Excellent talents in western countries can flow freely in the fields of government, enterprises, academic institutions and social organizations. In Western society, the working experience of NGOs is highly recognized. All these ensure the quality and sustainable development of Western NGOs.

The rapid development of NGOs in Myanmar truly reflects the political trend in Myanmar. From the perspective of the West, dividing Sino-Burmese relations has always been an important starting point for Western countries to try to weaken China's influence in Southeast Asia. Of course, they like the rapid reproduction and activity of NGOs in Myanmar. From our point of view, with the increasing activity of Western NGOs, the influence of Western countries in Myanmar is expanding rapidly, and the negative evaluation of Myanmar people on China is rising, public opinion will certainly affect government policies, which will have a negative impact on Sino-Myanmar relations. "It can be seen that for the countries represented by Myanmar, which have a stake in China, the internationalization of Chinese social organizations and the work of non-governmental diplomacy are imminent."

5.3 Supporting and cultivating NGOs representing Chinese values, focusing on striving for Myanmar intellectuals and youth groups, improving China-Myanmar non-governmental diplomacy and optimizing China-Myanmar relations.

For a long time, the socialist system and its ideology have been attacked, belittled and even vilified in the realistic international relations system, and European and American countries have also used values diplomacy to exert pressure on China in their relations with China. In this regard, some scholars believe that the Chinese government should reciprocate on the basis of the following principles: "Adhere to the principle of not engaging in confrontation of values, not using values to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries and as a criterion for determining relations between countries, but China should justifiably engage in values diplomacy, that is, to emphasize the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and the values that are compatible with it.". In terms of values diplomacy, we cannot avoid it, let alone shrink back (Xiao, 2006). "Similar thinking and suggestions are bold enough, but they do not involve how to implement socialist values diplomacy.". Based on the important role of western NGOs in their own values diplomacy, this paper argues that as the carrier and actor of values diplomacy, NGOs can effectively make up for the shortcomings of China's objective values diplomacy. The Chinese government can give priority to cultivating NGOs representing socialist core values, revealing and explaining China's "democratic outlook" and achievements in democratic construction to the public of the target countries, such as socialist core values, people's democracy in the whole process, deliberative democracy, grass-roots autonomy, direct election of village committees, etc.

In recent years, Western countries led by the United States, Britain and Japan have intensified their infiltration into Myanmar. The United States, Britain, Japan and other countries have United and made use of the nationalist forces after Myanmar's political transformation to create and support a number of mouthpieces of public opinion on China, in an attempt to influence Myanmar's social perception and communication judgment on China. For example, Aye Maung Kyaw, a senior researcher at the Myanmar think tank "Myanmar Affairs", believes that "there are indeed some Burmese who do not like China, especially young people who are greatly influenced by social media". Thus, it is very necessary for China to face and strive for this group of young people and intellectuals in Myanmar who are deeply influenced by Western values and culture. China can contact and communicate with NGOs and strive to change this group's



stereotyped perception of the Chinese government and system in a more flexible way, so as to optimize Myanmar's public opinion towards China and improve Sino-Myanmar relations.

China must attach importance to and support its NGOs to go abroad. The main factors that hinder Chinese NGOs from going abroad are traditions, history, system and other different factors. As far as traditions are concerned, China has always advocated pragmatism and moderation, and lacks sufficient interest and enthusiasm in influencing and even transforming the values, cultures and systems of other countries, which is in sharp contrast to the Western "missionary spirit" with the ultimate goal of shaping the beliefs of other countries. Objectively speaking, there is no difference between the advantages and disadvantages of the humanistic concept, but in the affairs of NGOs such as international volunteers, this idea of "sweeping the snow in front of each door" is not conducive to the development and maturity of Chinese NGOs, but also directly weakens the desire and motivation of Chinese NGOs to go abroad. Compared with the developed civil society in the West, China lacks the habits and soil of civil autonomy, which also affects the growth and development of social organizations such as NGOs. All of the above are what we need to study carefully, make correct decisions, and make great efforts to improve it.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The sudden emergence of NGOs in Myanmar has complicated domestic and foreign factors, but it can be roughly attributed to two categories: one is the adaptation after the transformation of political democratization in Myanmar; Second, the Western countries led by the United States, Britain and Japan added fuel to the flames. NGOs have been developing and growing rapidly in Myanmar. In addition to the traditional public welfare undertakings, Western NGOs and local NGOs are increasingly involved in Myanmar's politics and diplomacy, which has had a great impact on Sino-Myanmar relations, which deserves vigilance and attention. In this regard, China should not only maintain its strategic strength to ensure that the basic situation of Sino-Myanmar relations will not be broken by Western NGOs and the deliberate attacks of local NGOs in Myanmar, but also strengthen the research and contact of existing NGOs in Myanmar, learn from the successful experience of Western NGOs, encourage and support domestic NGOs to go abroad, and support and cultivate their own international NGOs. With NGO as the carrier,

China should carry out our own value diplomacy openly, so that the people of Myanmar can know, be familiar with and understand China's peripheral diplomatic concept of cordiality and tolerance, take the harmonious development of all mankind as the ultimate pursuit of the idea of a community of human destiny, and the core values of Chinese socialism including democracy and the rule of law. Let them realize that the western countries' way is not the only choice.

Finally, China should objectively view and properly deal with the impact and influence of Myanmar NGOs on Sino-Myanmar relations after the political transformation. On the one hand, it is necessary to see the long-suppressed public opinion behind the rise of NGOs in Myanmar. On the other hand, it is also necessary to rationally and soberly look at the public opinion and emotions that have been strictly controlled for a long time in Myanmar. Under the guidance and instigation of some Western NGOs and domestic extreme nationalism, it is also expected that Myanmar's domestic public opinion will vent its guns at China, which has close ties with the Myanmar military. Secondly, China must also be soberly aware that "how to deal with NGOs has become an unavoidable issue in China's diplomacy, which also requires the common thinking of social forces, including Chinese NGOs." (Bao & Huang, 2016 ). "In the face of the growing influence of Myanmar NGOs, China should firmly believe that the basic situation of China-Myanmar relations has not changed, and the general direction of the development of China-Myanmar relations remains firm." At the same time, China should not ignore the increasingly powerful democratic forces and NGO forces in Myanmar. In a word, China should fight resolutely to turn enemies into friends and use them for its own purpose.

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